Krsna the Envoy of the Pandavas
A Story from the Mahabharata
adapted from "Thirteen Play scripts by Bhasa", 13th Century

This play may be performed with a few actors, the rest are implied. The play begins with an Invocation or dance.

Narrator: May Visnu□s foot protect you, the foot that brings joy to all the worlds; that with slender, dark red nails sent Namuci whirling through the sky. With these words, my lords and gentlemen, I have to announce to you (he is distracted by noises backstage) But, what is that? I thought I heard a noise, just as I was to make my announcement. Well, I must see what it is □

Voice: (calls) Ho there, guardians of the gate! King Duryodhana commands!

Narrator: We have to get started right away. The scene is the palace of Duryodhana at Hastinapura, India over 5000 years ago. Duryodhana had cheated Yudhisthira of the throne in a gambling match and exiled Yudhisthira and his brothers for seven years. Returning after the exile, the five Pandavas brothers asked for just a village apiece to rule over nut the envious Duryodhana refused even that. A great war was being readied at the Battlefield of Kurushetre and here Lord Krsna Himself is coming to Duryodhana to attempt to negotiate a peaceful settlement between the two sides of the family.
As the scene opens, a servitor prepares the war-council chamber.

Act One

Chamberlain: Ho there, guardians of the gate! King Duryodhana commands, Today will we take counsel with all the sovereigns. So let all the kings be summoned. (stopping and looking around) Oh, here is King Duryodhana coming this very way. He appears as a dusky youth in a white silk robe with anointed limbs beneath the royal parasol and chowrie. Splendid, with limbs lit up by glistening jewelry, a full moon among the constellations.

Duryodhana: (entering) My heart, it seems, has dispelled its wrath in the joyful thought that this festival of battle has at last arrived. I long to mar the faces of the champions tuskers in the Pandavas force by backing out their ivory pestles!

Chamberlain: Victory to the king! The entire body of kings has been assembled as your Majesty commanded.

Duryodhana: Well done. You may retire within.

Chamberlain: As your Majesty commands.

Duryodhana: (addressing companions) My Lords Vaikara and Varshadeva, I have a vast army of eleven divisions. Tell me, who is fit to be the Commander-In-Chief? What do you say? (Duryodhana listens carefully)An important matter, Vaikara? Varshadev, you say you wish to give me your opinion after due deliberation, do you? ? Quite so. Come then, friends, let us go into the council-chamber. (to Dronacharya) Preceptor, my salutations, please go in. My lords Vaikarna and Varshadev enter. And all ye warriors pray enter freely. Karna, my comrade, let us go in.

(Duryodhana enters the council-chamber)

Preceptor (to Dronacarya), this is the tortoise

seat; please sit down. Grandfather Bhisma, here is the lion seat; do you sit here. Uncle, there is the leather seat for you. Vaikarna and Varshadeva, pray sit down here. And all of you warriors take your seats as you will. (listens) What's that the king is still standing?? Aha! How loyal are you all. Well, well, I take my seat at the head of the assembly. Do you sit down also, good sirs. (extending his hand) Karna, my friend, let us sit together here. (Duryodhana sits down) Tell me, my Lords Vailakrna and Varshadev, who is fit to be Commander-In-Chief of my vast army of eleven divisions? What do you say?

(listens) His Highness of Gandhara should speak first. Very well, my Uncle shall have his say. (extends his hand) Proceed. (listens) Ah? Who else shall be Commander while Ganges' son is there?? Well said, Uncle. So let it be. Grandfather? That is your desire also? So let it be.

May the hearts of the Pandavas chieftains sink as the consecrating water falls on Bhisma's head, to the roar of the host, the rolling of the drums and the conch shells blare, loud as the thundering of the sea when it has been lashed to fury by a gale.

(The Chamberlain enters.)

Chamberlain: Victory to the king! Here is Narayana, the best of men, arrived as an ambassador from the Pandava's court. He wishes to speak with you.

Duryodhana: Nay, not so, Master Chamberlain. What? Is Kamsa's nephew, Damodara, your best man? Is that cowherd thy best? Deprived of lands, reputation and wealth by Bhihadratha's son, is He thy best man? What kind of conduct is this for an attendant of the sovereign's person? What insolent words! Ha! To hell

with you!

Chamberlain: (fearful) Forgive me, your Majesty, forgive me! In my confusion, I forgot the proper etiquette. (He falls at Duryodhana’s feet.)

Duryodhana: Confusion? Ah! Some men are liable to confusion. Rise.

Chamberlain: (relieved) I thank you.

Duryodhana: Now I am satisfied. Master Chamberlain, who is this envoy? Who has come?

Chamberlain: An envoy of the Pandavas has come … one Kesava.

Duryodhana: Kesava? Yes, that’s the way to announce Him. That’s the proper etiquette. Tell me, Princes, what is the proper way to deal with Kesava, Who has come as an envoy? (listens) What do you say? He should be received with honor? That is not my opinion. Prison, I think, is the best place for Him. If Kesava is made captive, the Pandavas will have lost their eyes. With the Pandavas destitute of resources and counsel, the whole Earth will be mine without a rival! What’s more, if anyone rises to meet Kesava, I will fine him twelve gold pieces. So, don’t be forgetting it. (aside) Now, how can I avoid getting up myself? Yes, I see a way. (aloud) Chamberlain, fetch me that scroll with the painting of Draupadi being dragged by the hair and by her clothes into the assembly of the Gambling Match. (aside) I can fix my eyes on that and need not rise for Kesava.

Chamberlain: As your Majesty commands.
(He goes out and returns with the scroll.)

Duryodhana: Spread it out flat before me.

Chamberlain: As your Majesty commands. (He spreads out the scroll.)

Duryodhana: Oh, what a splendid picture! (He points as he describes the painting) Here is Duhsasana. He has seized Draupadi by the locks of her long, black hair. This is Draupadi-rudely beset by Duhsasana, eyes staring wide in fright, she looks like the digit of the moon in the jaws of the demon of eclipse.

Here is the evil-minded Bhima. Seeing Draupadi insulted in the presence of all the princes, wrath swells within him and he measures the distance between us. Here is Yudhisthira - truthful,.. righteous and compassionate, though his wits be lost in gambling, he pacifies Bhima with side-long glances.

And here is Arjuna:
Lips quivering, eyes blurred with rage, he recks but a straw (thinks little of) for that ring of foes and, as if he would annihilate all those kings, he draws back softly upon the Gandiva bow?s string.

Here is Yudhisthira restraining Arjuna.
Here are Nakula and Sahadeva:
Girded up with sword and buckler in their hands, their faces flush and stern, biting hard their lover lips. They are free from fear of death. Fiercely they would attack my brother like two fawns setting upon a lion.

Here is Yudhisthira approaching the princes and

restraining them. He says, "It is I that have fallen, with a mind perverse as it may be. How then do you lay aside your wrath, knowing right and wrong? Men too proud to bear defeat, their powers vanquished by the decision of the dice."

Here is the king of Gandarbha, Sakunin – the master gambler breaks into insolent laughter as he casts the dice, nipping his opponent's happiness in the bud with his own renown. Sprawling as he pleases, he leers at the weeping Draupadi and, skilled at the game, he scrapes the ground.

Here are the Preceptor, Dronacharya, and Grandfather Bhisma. Ashamed to see her in this plight, they hide their faces in the end of their robes.

How rich the colors are! What wonderful expressions! A perfect scene! The picture is excellently painted! We are pleased.

(Chamberlain enters, knocking to get Duryodhana?s attention.) Who is there?

Chamberlain: Victory to the king!

Duryodhana: Ah, bring in that envoy, so puffed up just because it is a bird He rides.

Chamberlain: As your Majesty commands. (He exits)

Duryodhana: Karna, my comrade -
Black-hearted Kesava has come here today as an envoy, like a hireling, at the Pandavas bequest. Prepare thine ears, friend Karna, to hear the words of Yudhisthira, gentle as a woman's.

(Krsna and Chamberlain enter.)

Krsna: At the bidding of Yudhisthira and from true friendship with Arjuna, I have taken on today the thankless role of envoy to Suyodhana (Duryodhana). The forest of the Kuru's family tree will be blasted in battle by the fierce gusts of Arjuna's arrows fanning flames of Bhima's anger. His wrath is fired by the shame of Draupadi and ever he bears the terrible mace to crush the foreheads of elephants in the foe's host.

This is Duryodhana's camp, here, indeed!

The king's pavilions are like celestial cities set up at heart's desire; vast armories are crammed with weapons of every sort and kind. Troops of fine horses are neighing in their stalls; elephants are trumpeting. All this opulent power is doomed to dissolution because of the offending of the Pandavas.

Alas, this evil-speaking, virtue-hating rascal Sudhyodhana, ruthless to his kinsmen, will not do the deed he ought, even on seeing Me.
(to Chamberlain) Badrayana, am I to enter?

Chamberlain: Why yes, Krsna may be pleased to enter.

Krsna: (going in) (to Himself) Why, what is this? On seeing Me, all the warriors are disturbed. (to assembly) Do not disturb yourselves; pray, sit at ease.

Duryodhana: (to himself) What's this? All the warriors are disturbed at seeing Kesava. (to assembly) Stop moving about now. Remember the fine that was imposed. I am master here.

Krsna: Ah, Duryodhana, how are you?

Duryodhana: (falls off his seat) (aside) It's clear enough; Kesava has arrived. Boldly, I made up my mind and firmly I stuck to my seat. But, by Kesava's power I was forced off my seat! Ha! This Kesava is a trickster! (to Krsna) Master Envoy, here is a seat (gesturing) pray be seated.

Krsna: (to Dronacarya) Preceptor, take your seat. Grandfather Bhisma and other warriors, sit down at your ease. We too will sit. (sitting down, he notices the picture before D) Oh, what is this picture?!

> No, no! It is a painting of Draupadi being dragged by the hair and clothes into the assembly of the Gambling Match!! And here, forsooth - Here is Duryodhana! In his childishness, he thinks that the shaming of his kin is a deed of valor! Who in the world is so lost to the sense of decency as to expose his own crime in an assembly of his peers and his masters!? Oh, let that picture be removed!

Duryodhana: Take the picture away, Chamberlain.

Chamberlain: As your Majesty commands.
(He removes the picture, then returns.)

Duryodhana: Say, Master Envoy - are they all in good health? Yudhisthira, the son of righteousness, mighty Bhima, my cousin Arjuna, the son of the lord of gods and the modest twins, the Asvin's sons - are they and their families well?

Krsna: This is worthy of Gandhari's son. Yes, yes all

are well. And, the Pandavas also make enquiry as to the prosperity and health within and without of your realm and person. As well, they have added this message "Great trouble have we endured; the time of exile decreed is now fulfilled. So let the share be given of whatever inheritance is ours by law."

Duryodhana: What inheritance!? My uncle, Pandu, while hunting in the forest, once performed an evil deed and incurred a sage's wrath. Thenceforth, desire for his spouses left Pandu and his wives begat children with the demigods. How shall there be patrimony for the sons of others?

Krsna: To you, so versed in family lore, I pose this question:

Vicitravirya, the profiligate of the Kurus, was destroyed by a wasting sickness. How then did thy father, Dhritarasthra, begotten by Vyasa in the maidservant Ambika, succeed to the throne? Nay, do not make this claim of patrimony. In this way, if one waxes a mutual enmity, O king, the Kuru race will soon be but a name. So, restraining wrath, your Highness should do what the Pandavas humbly request with all affection.

Duryodhana: Master Envoy, You know nothing of state affairs.

Monarchy belongs to brave princes who defeat their foes. It never comes by begging in this world, nor by charity to the poor. If they wish to win sovereignty, let them join forthwith in battle or else go as they will to seek peace in hermitages inhabited by men of more tranquil minds.

Krsna: O Duryodhana, speak not so harshly to your kin!

Though by store of merit one attains fame and glory, yet should one cheat a kinsman or friend, all one's efforts are in vain.

Duryodhana: Master Envoy - Thou hadst no pity for King Kamsa, Thy sire's brother-in-law. Why should we feel pity for these Pandavas who are our constant enemies?

Krsna: Do not think that I was desiring to kill Kamsa. Many a time had he brought sorrow on my Mother by the loss of her sons and he had imprisoned his own father. So was he slain by Death Himself.

Duryodhana: You cheated Kamsa in every way. No self-praises now. That was no brave act. When the King of Magdha blazed with wrath at the slaughter of his son-in-law, You didst flee from that place, sick with fear - where was Thy bravery then?

Krsna: Suyodhana, the bravery of the politic regards the place, the time and the situation. So much then for your own pleasantry. Come now, let us return focus to my errand. I suggest that you show affection to your cousins; forget their faults. An alliance made with kin is good for both this world and the next.

Duryodhana: How can there be kinship between mortal man and sons of gods? This conversation is like grinding what is ground. Enough! Cut short this tale.

Krsna: (aside) Propitiated for peace, he bates nothing of haughty nature. Well, I must probe him with harsh and bitter words. (aloud) Suyodhana, do you not know the might and prowess of Arjuna?

Duryodhana: (amused) Not I.

Krsna: Harken then - To the lord of beasts in hunter's guise, Arjuna gave his fill of fighting. When fire consumed the Khandava woods, a deluge of rain was held off by Arjuna'sarrows. The fiends in armor impenetrable, who harrassed Indra the lord of the demigods, Arjuna destroyed as if in sport. Single-handed, Arjuna put Grandfather Bhisma and the rest to flight in the city of Virata.

Again I will tell you something which you witnessed yourself. Visiting the herdsmen's station, thou wast carried off screaming to the sky by Chitrasena and set free by Arjuna. In short, O son of Dhritarastha, give half the kingdom, at my demand, or else the Pandavas will seize the Earth from sea to sea.

Duryodhana: (amused) What's that? The Pandavas will seize the Earth? Though the wind god, himself, in Bhima's form be smiting in the battle and Indra manifest in the shape of Arjuna - I hereby declare that not a blade of grass will I give of my realm! My Father held it and with valor will we guard it, despite all thy words, Thou Champion of bitter speech.

Krsna: Disgrace of the Kuru house, seeker after shame, are we talking of grass?

Duryodhana: Why Cowherd, grass is the element that you understand. Having slain an innocent maid, Putana, a horse and even a bull - oh and wrestlers, too - Thou, O Shameless One, thou wouldst fain converse with those holding ruling power?

Krsna: What, Duryodhana, are you mocking Me?!

Duryodhana: Nay, but that is true.

Krsna: I shall withdraw from this place at once.

Duryodhana: GO! Go to Your stall with limbs white with the dust from the hooves of Your cattle. Your time here has been wasted.

Krsna: So be it, then. But I will not depart without delivering the message of the Pandavas. Hearken then, to the words of Yudhisthira.

Duryodhana: Bah! You are not worthy to be spoken to. Over me is borne the white umbrella. My head is sprinkled with holy water from the hands of the highest priest. I do not need to speak, I say, with men like Thee, attendants of my vassal kings.

Krsna: Suyodhana, forsooth, holds no converse with Me. Ha! Thou cheat, ruthless to thy kin! Thou crow! The Kuru house shall come swiftly to destruction on account of thee. I would not waste Yudhisthira's words. Princes, I take your leave.

Duryodhana: How now? Kesava would be off? He has abused an envoy's privilege by speaking His mind in this way! Bind him, Duhsasana; and you, Durmashana, Durmukha, Durbudhi and Dustesvara also. (He waits impatiently.) What, are you weaklings? This Kesava murdered noble Kamsa, slew a horse and an elephant! Bred in a family of cowhwerds, He is ignorant of etiquette. Devoid of strength and valor, Kesava is guilty, by His own admission, in the presence of the princely class. Straightaway, let Him be bound. This Person is a weakling. Uncle, do you bind this

Kesava. What!? My Uncle turns and falls down!? Well, I myself will bind Him with a noose. (to another) Guard, give me your noose. (He pantomimes that he approaches Krsna with an uplifted noose.)

Krsna: What, Suyodhana, forsooth, wishes to fetter Me? Very well, I shall test His strength. Behold My Universal Form.
(Krsna displays His Universal Form.)

Duryodhana: (Duryodhana is bewildered by Krsna's mystic powers.)
Master Envoy, today am I going to bind Thee, admidst the host of kings, though Thee makest Thine own magic or useth the magic divine all around us!. Even if Thou smitest me with celestial weapons difficult to parry. Proud as Thou art of felling the elephant, horse and bull! Ah, stay now. (stumbles) How is it that I can no longer see Kesava? Here He is! How small He is! ? He's gone again! Now, here He Is! ? How tall He looks! ? He's gone again! ? Now, here He is! There are Kesavas all around the council-chamber. What shall I do? ? Yes, I have it! (to assembly) Princes, each bind one Kesava. How now, they are all falling down, bound in their own bonds!! Bravo, Sorcerer, bravo!

The Pandavas will be sighing deeply, with eyes bedimmed with tears, when they see Thee carried to their camp, wounded with a network of arrows sped from my bowstring and with Thy every limb dyed with running gore! (Krsna leaves. Duryodhana calls after Him) Krsna! Krsna! Come back! Why do you go? We will meet on the battlefield then, Krsna! Krsna!